

TRUTH ON TRIAL

A 12-week series on
the Evidence for
Christianity



Sermon Notes 3/20/2022

“The Truth about Jesus”

How can we know the truth about Jesus?

1. **H**_____ outside the Bible
Acts 26:25-26
2. **O**_____ Prophecies
Acts 26:27-28
3. **P**_____ of the New Testament
Hebrews 1:8
John 1:1, 14
Titus 2:13
2 Peter 1:1
John 14:6
John 8:58-59
Mark 14:61-64
4. **E**_____ Christ in our lives
Galatians 2:20
1 Peter 3:15
Matthew 27:22

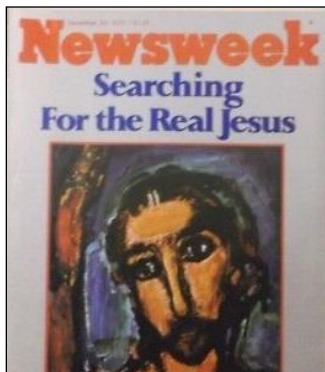
Small Group Discussion Guide

Lesson 10: “The Truth about Jesus

When someone claims to be Jesus Christ, we usually assume that he is a lunatic or a liar and perhaps even dangerous. That was certainly the case with Jim Jones. This charismatic cult leader claimed to be the reincarnation of Christ—the real Jesus. In 1978, Jones ordered a mass murder/suicide that ended the lives of 909 members of the People’s Temple. 304 of the victims were children.

But what about the historical Jesus from the first century? Was He a lunatic or a liar? Or was He really the Lord?

People today have some strange ideas about Jesus. In his book, *The DaVinci Code* Dan Brown promotes the idea that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were lovers. And many so called “scholars” think that the historical Jesus was very different from the Christ of Christianity.



How can we know the truth about Jesus?

1. History outside of the Bible

The testimony of sources outside the Bible are not infallible. And many times, the statements made about Jesus by secular sources contain false ideas. However, there are many biblical facts about Jesus that are verified by extra-biblical sources.

Occasionally, we may hear someone try to argue that Jesus was just a legend created by the early church. However, virtually all historians today reject the theory that Jesus never existed because the evidence from ancient sources outside the Bible is indisputable.

In his book, *The Historical Jesus*, Gary Habermas identifies **129** specific facts about Jesus that are confirmed by **45** different ancient sources outside of the Bible.

There can be little doubt that this is a substantial amount of pre- and non-New Testament material for Jesus' existence and for numerous facts about his life. In light of these reports, we can better understand how groundless the speculations are that deny his existence or that postulate only a minimal amount of facts concerning him.¹

Here are some of the non-Christian sources from the first and second century that mention Jesus as a real person:

Historians: Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, Phlegon

Government Officials: Pliny the Younger, Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian

Other Sources: The Jewish Talmud and the Greek writer Lucian

Josephus mentions Jesus on more than one occasion. In the following quote, Josephus describes how Ananus, the high priest had James the brother of Jesus put to death.

“He (Ananus) assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”²

¹ Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 251.

² Josephus, *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 423.

Josephus was not a Christian. He was a Jewish historian who wrote about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In this text, he verifies the historical facts that Jesus was a man who was called Christ, He had a brother named James, and Ananus the high priest along with the Sanhedrin condemned James to death by stoning. These are all historical details that confirm what the Bible tells us about Jesus.

Concerning the Jewish Talmud, Geisler notes that, “Talmudic writings of most value concerning the historical Jesus are those compiled between AD 70 and 200...The most significant text is Sanhedrin 43a: ‘On the eve of Passover *Yeshua* was hanged.’”³

The Jewish Talmud was written by Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus as the Messiah. If Jesus was just a legend created by early Christians, the Jewish leaders never would have written about Him as if He was a real person in history. They would have exposed Him as a myth.

Here are some facts about Jesus confirmed by ancient non-Christian sources:

1. Jesus lived during time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonderworker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. An eclipse & earthquake occurred when He died.
8. He was crucified on the eve of the Passover.
9. His disciples believed He rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.⁴

³ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 383.

⁴ Geisler and Turek, 223.

2. Old Testament Prophecies

In their book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh and Sean McDowell list over **191** specific prophecies made about Jesus in the Old Testament.⁵ Here are just a few of the things the Old Testament predicted concerning Jesus.

- He would be the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:18 and Gal. 3:16).
- He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10 and Luke 3:33).
- He would be from the line of David (Jer. 23:5 and Matt. 1:1).
- He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2 and Matt. 2:1).
- He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14 and Matt. 1:23).
- He would be the Son of God (Ps. 2:7 and Matt. 3:17).
- He would be a prophet (Deut. 18:18 and Matt. 21:11).
- He would be a priest (Ps. 110:4 and Heb. 7).
- He would be a king (Ps 2:6 and Matt. 27:37).
- He would be sold for 30 silver coins (Zech. 11:12 and Heb. 5:6).
- He would be beaten and spit on (Is. 50:6 and Matt. 26:67).
- His hands and feet would be pierced (Ps. 22:16 and John 20:25).

According to the science of probability the chances of any one person fulfilling just 8 of these prophecies are 1 in 10^{17} . That number is a 1 followed by 17 zeros. If there were that many silver dollars in Texas, the entire state would be covered two feet deep in silver dollars. If you wrote your name on one of those silver dollars and told someone to go to Texas and randomly pick up one silver dollar, what are the chances that he would pick the coin with your name on it? And remember, Jesus didn't just fulfill 8 prophecies about the Messiah. He fulfilled all of them!

⁵ Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 229-231.

3. Proclamations of the New Testament

Last week we saw abundant evidence for the truthfulness of the 27 books of the New Testament. These documents make bold proclamations about Jesus. They clearly teach the deity of Christ.

What do the following passages say about Jesus?

John 1:1, 14

Titus 2:13

Hebrews 1:8

2 Peter 1:1

In addition to all the things the New Testament writers said about Jesus we must also consider the proclamations Jesus made about Himself. In addition to all the things the New Testament writers said about Jesus we must also consider the proclamations Jesus made about Himself. Jesus claimed to be the only way for people to come to the Father (John 14:6). Jesus also claimed to have the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-11). This is something that only God can do. And when the Pharisees heard Jesus telling people that their sins were forgiven, they accused Him of blasphemy.



What did Jesus say about Himself in the following passages?

John 8:58-59

John 17:5

Mark 14:61-64

Jesus was willing to be tortured and crucified rather than deny His identity as the Son of God. Many people will acknowledge that Jesus was a good teacher but at the same time they will refuse to accept the claims Jesus made about Himself. C.S. Lewis points out how foolish that is.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would rather be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁶

4. Experience Christ in our lives

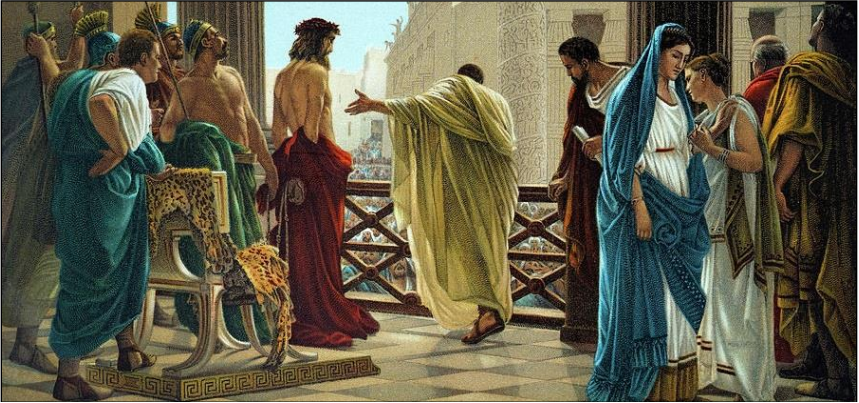
The most convincing evidence for Jesus is the experience of Christ in our lives. When people see positive changes taking place in our lives, and when they see us living through difficult times with confidence and hope, then they see evidence that is personal and practical. When we were baptized into Christ our old life was buried and we were raised up with a new life in Christ. “We are a new creation in Christ. The old things are gone. Behold! New things have come.”

Can people see Christ living in you?

It starts by making Christ the Lord of your life (1 Peter 3:15).

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 55-56.

In Matthew 27:22, Pilate asked the crowd, “What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” And this is the question we must all answer. We cannot just politely say that Jesus was a good teacher and nothing more. The evidence demands that we either **REJECT** Jesus as a liar or a lunatic or **ACCEPT** Him as our Lord. What will you do with Jesus who is called Christ?



Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the false ideas that people today believe about Jesus?
2. Why do you think so many people believe that Jesus was a good teacher while at the same time rejecting Him as the Son of God?
3. What are some things that secular history confirms about Jesus?
4. What is your favorite prophecy about Jesus? Why?
5. Without looking in your Bibles, how many Old Testament prophecies about Jesus can you remember?
6. What do you think is the most powerful evidence for the deity of Christ? Why?
7. How should our lives as Christians provide evidence for who Jesus really is?